

GROOMING AND PHYSICAL EXAMINATION

A PICTORIAL Photos taken by Nick Morganelli of Winston-Salem, NC

Many clients like to have their pet bird groomed and examined several times a year. When I do these procedures I prefer to anesthetize the bird with isoflurane gas. This greatly reduces stress to the bird as well as to the veterinarian and his assistant. This technique is very safe and universally accepted by almost all of my clients once they have seen it done. With the bird relaxed, a much more thorough exam is possible and grooming procedures are more easily performed. A visual description of how I examine and groom a bird (Hyacinth macaw, Green-winged macaw, and a Hahn's macaw) is outlined below.



Fig 1 and 2: I use a clean towel to catch and hold the bird. I do not use gloves. Nets may be used for free-flying aviary birds.



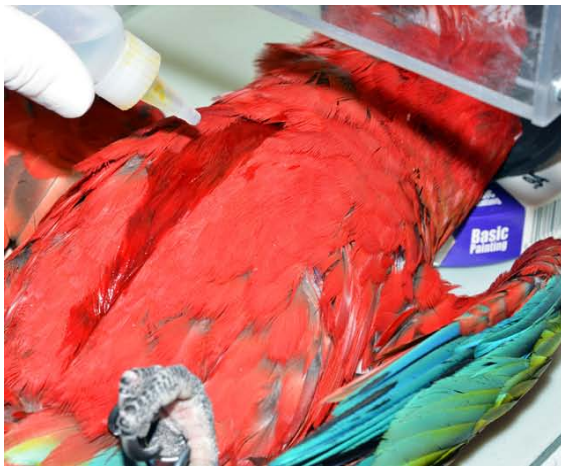
Figs 3 and 4: Isoflurane gas is administered via a face mask. The bird slowly relaxes and is sedated in about 30 seconds.



Figs 5 and 6: The bird is positioned on its back and a roll of masking tape is placed under the face mask. This lifts the bird's head higher than its body which helps prevent any passive regurgitation of crop contents into the oral cavity. This is why I recommend no food or water for several hours before an exam.



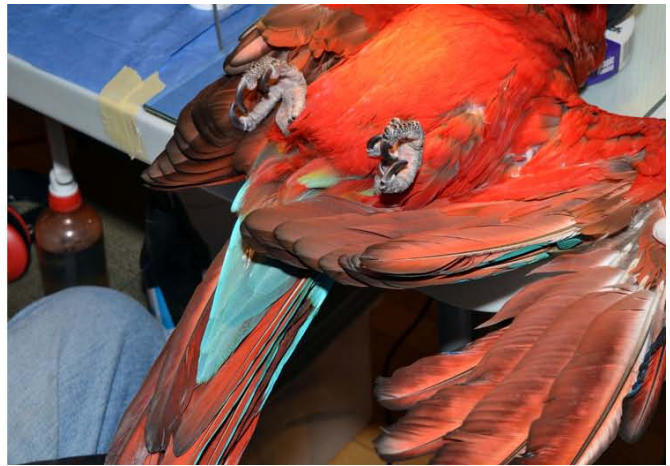
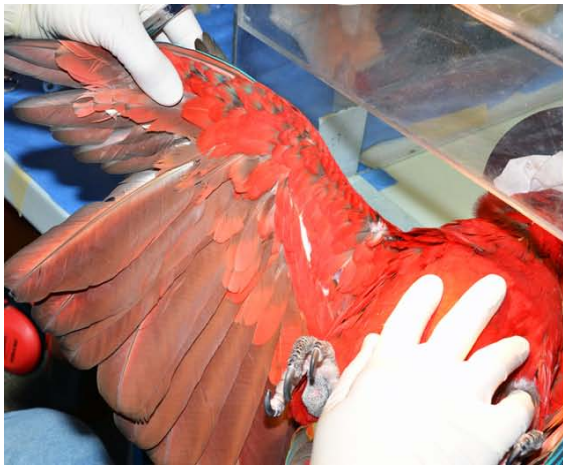
Figs 7 and 8: The anesthetic cone and the bird's body are kept under the exhaust hood at all times. This prevents the veterinarian or anyone in the same room from breathing waste gas.



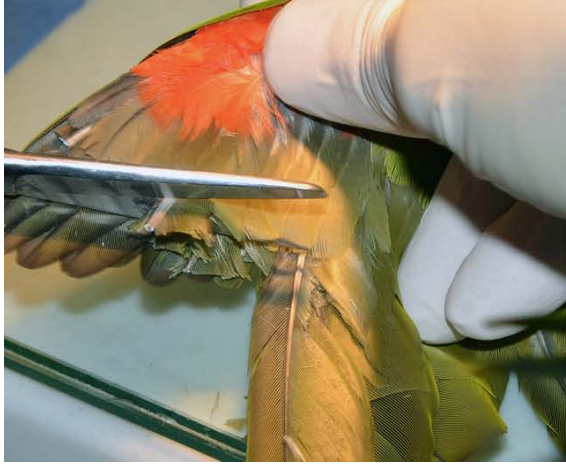
Figs 9 and 10: I use 70% alcohol to wet the feathers over the chest and abdomen. This allows me to spread the feathers so I can directly visualize the skin over the breast, the breast muscle itself, the abdominal region, and the vent. I am able to evaluate the bird's general condition and ascertain a weight description.



Figs 11 and 12: The cloaca (vent) is inspected with a Q-tip to look for papillomas (venereal warts) and any other abnormalities.



Figs 13 and 14: I manipulate each wing to check for arthritis, old fractures, feather cysts, wing tumors, etc. If the client wants the bird's wings clipped, I do it at this time. I will clip the wings however the client wishes.



Figs 15 and 16: If the owner wants the bird not to fly, then my standard technique is to trim the first 7 or 8 primary flight feathers on each wing. They are trimmed back far enough so that the cut edges lie beneath the tip of the primary covert feathers. I use scissors for small birds and white toenail dog trimmers for larger birds. Note how this instrument makes a clean cut on the feather shaft.



Figs 17 and 18: This provides a cosmetic trim and effectively renders the bird flightless.



Figs 19 and 20: Next I turn the bird over and evaluate the tail feathers and preen gland, which is located on the bird's rump, just above the tail base. I'm looking specifically for swelling of the gland which could indicate plugging or infection. I will palpate the back for any spinal deformities.



Figs 21 and 22: Then I roll the bird onto its back again. I manipulate each leg for stiffness and look for any type of abnormality. I exam the feet and inspect each digit and nail. I also inspect the underside of each foot and the ankle (hock) for sores, scabs, or wear spots. If the bird is banded, I make sure the band is not too tight or too loose. I do not recommend removing bands unless there is a problem.



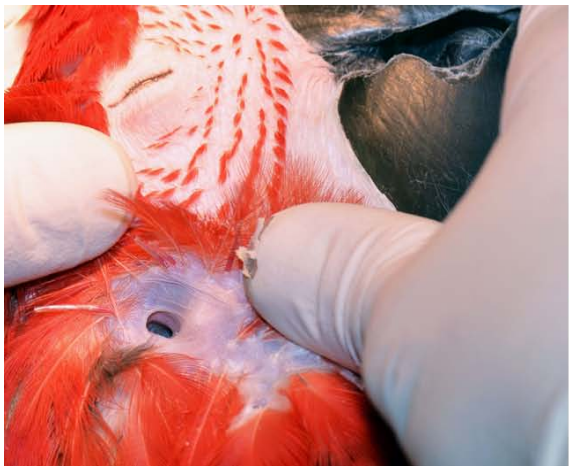
Figs 23 and 24: If the owner wants the nails trimmed, I do this next. Nails are trimmed with either human or canine toenail clippers. I will usually dremel the cut edges to smooth out any jagged or sharp points. If any bleeding occurs, I will pack the nails with a coagulant powder (Kwik Stop).



Figs 25 and 26: At this point, isoflurane anesthesia is discontinued. The bird is then weighed on a digital scale and the weight recorded in grams.



Figs 27 and 28: Next I examine the bird's head. I check the nares for any accumulated debris. If the nares are occluded, I clean them with a dental curette. I examine the eyes and surrounding sinus area for any abnormalities.



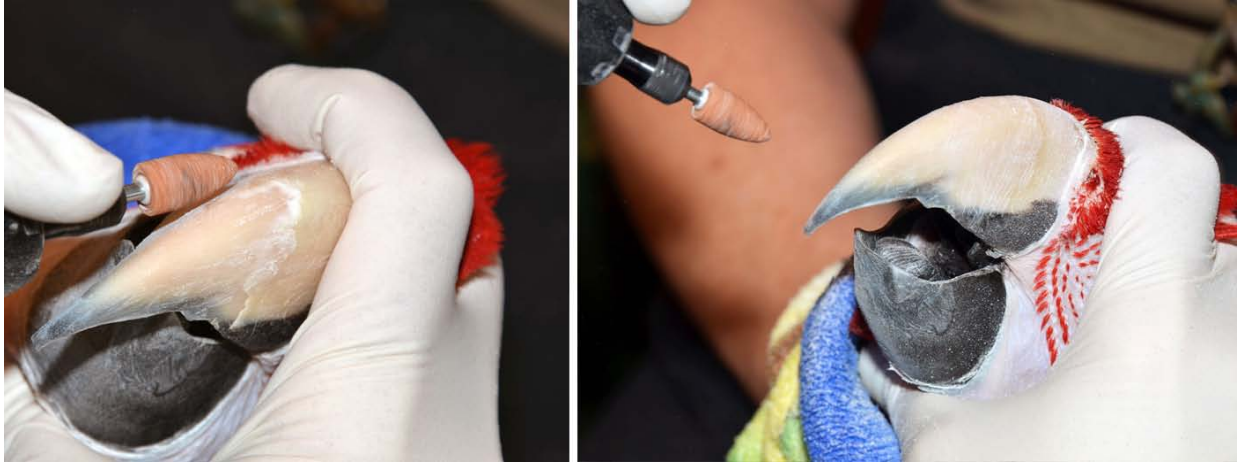
Figs 29 and 30: I look in the ears for accumulated wax or inflammation. Then I inspect the mouth by opening the beak. I examine the tongue, the opening of the windpipe, and the choanal slit (back of the nasal cavity) in the roof of the mouth. I also look for any discharges and check for foul odor. I will also palpate the neck and crop.



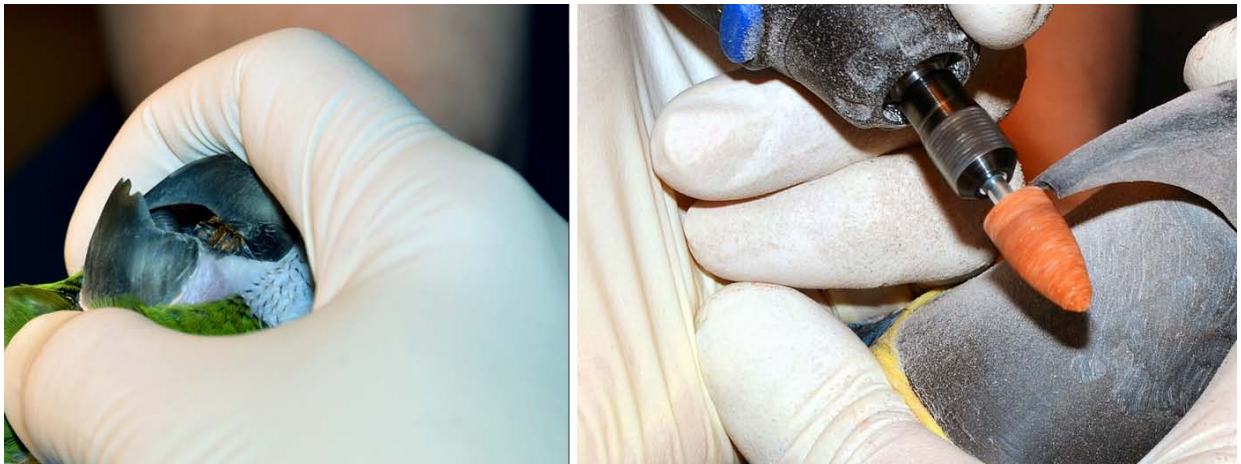
Figs 31 and 32: Lastly, I trim the bird's beak. First I make sure the bird is starting to rouse. I hold the bird until its eyes start to blink regularly and there is some movement of the legs or wings. Then the bird is wrapped in a towel and held lightly by an assistant.



Figs 33 and 34: I control the head and neck with one hand while the other hand holds a variable speed dremel tool with a coarse conical grinding stone.



Figs 35 and 36: If the surface of the beak is scaly and irregular, I will smooth it out. This part of the trim is purely cosmetic.



Figs 37 and 38: Next I smooth out any jagged edges or long growth on the tip of the lower beak by holding the upper beak inside the lower beak which gives me more access to it. Lastly I will shorten and blunt the tip of the upper beak (if needed) and clean up the side edges.



Figs 39 and 40: Kwik Stop can be applied to the beak tip or edges if any bleeding occurs or as a preventative. Excess beak dust is removed with aerosolized, canned air.



Figs 41 and 42: A few drops of mineral oil are placed on the beak and rubbed in with a gauze sponge to give it a finishing shine.



Figs 43 and 44: Usually at this point the bird is almost fully awake. The assistant may hold the bird in the towel for another minute or it is placed on the floor to fully recover. Then the bird is placed in its carrier or cage and monitored for the next 10-15 minutes.